

SPRING AND AUTUMN

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Spring and Autumn by Anne Judith Penny

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ANNE JUDITH PENNY

**SPRING
AND AUTUMN**

SPRING AND AUTUMN.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'MORNING CLOUDS.'

'The broken tale of what was long ago
How the heart's pictures faded, and the gold
Of Hope grew dim.'

DORA GREENWELL.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, ROBERTS, & GREEN.

1865.

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SPRING AND AUTUMN.

CHAPTER I.

Her bountiful sweet eyes
Looked out full lovingly on all the world.
Oh, tender as the deeps in yonder skies
Their beaming! but her rosebud lips were curled
With the soft dimple of a musing smile.

* * * * *

A east of bees, a slowly moving wain,
The scent of bean-flowers wafted up a dell,
Blue pigeons wheeling over fields of grain,
Or bleat of folded lamb, would please her well.

JEAN INGELW.

DID you really never know a case of people who loved each other tenderly, doing each other irreparable harm? It is not an uncommon thing: among all the tragedies that this world covers up with decent calm, you may often find it. Let me tell you an instance. As those who suffered have long been consoled by time and death, you need not grieve to hear it. Pity for quite past troubles does us good:

if in no other way, it helps us to forget, for a time, the troubles that fret us now.

It was in a small village in Hampshire, on the borders of the New Forest, that Peter Hatton went to live with his sister Maida, on their return from several years' residence in Germany. His object in life was abstruse study; hers to make his home delightful, until she left it for one of her own. She was, however, some few years past thirty, and therefore she never allowed any thought of leaving Peter to transpire; and if other people ever spoke of it as possible, she would gravely discountenance the idea, by saying that nothing could be happier than living in that lovely old place with her favourite brother; they agreed with each other so exactly, his tastes were so nicely suited to hers; and, besides, the poor fellow needed all the comfort she could give;—it was the least she could do to devote her life to him. And then a sigh would intimate more than it was necessary to express; for all who knew the Hattons knew that Peter had been disappointed in life doubly: a long engagement having been broken off by the sudden death of the lady; and the shock having caused such disturbance to mind and health, that he was obliged to resign

every professional pursuit—to give up the law, and live on the moderately good income which he already had. But this, which was at first a sacrifice, became in the long run an immunity, and while acquaintance consoled with him on the inactive seclusion to which he seemed condemned, his relations and friends saw that it was precisely the sort of life that suited a book-worm best; and as years went on, it was really difficult to believe there was any longer much amiss with him in any way. He looked entirely well, and even to his sister's penetrating eye it appeared that his grief for a lost love had mellowed to a kind of poetic luxury, and seldom took much effect on his present habits of thought, until he fancied some one was trying to beguile him into another heart affair; in which case he would seem ostentatiously retrospective, and, whenever opportunity offered, speak severely of men or women who could give away their hearts a second time. He did not know it, but he had done the same thing. Ellen Knowles had been loved as much as he could love a woman; and now literature had the concentrated affections of his profound and ardent mind.

Nevertheless, his household was still regulated on the old system, and it was Maida's unchanging creed that Peter's state of health needed every consider-

ation. He preferred a quiet life, being, like many another student, both rather awkward and very shy, —therefore she would not cultivate the society of many neighbours. He found that he could write best in the evening, therefore early dinners must be the rule; and because some seven years ago the doctors had forbidden him tea, it was banished from the breakfast table at Maplehurst still.

Neighbours observed these facts with kindly amusement. Miss Hatton was certainly a very devoted sister, but surely she carried her affectionate solicitude a little too far? (No doubt she did: but who does not like to give her chief pleasure the honours of duty?) She made quite a religion of 'cossetting' the rosy-cheeked old bachelor. It was spoiling his temper and making his crotchets ineradicable; whenever he did marry, his wife would have no easy post. Of course no one besides Maida ever believed that he really intended to remain single. And as to Maida herself, seeing her composed demeanour, her quiet eyes and still mouth, with the sad coloured silks she always chose to wear, and the tasteful rarity of her ornaments, one would have supposed that she had taken up the grave honours of middle age with full acceptance; that she felt as we do at the end of a bright summer, when shorten-

ing daylight turns our liking more and more towards the snug comforts of a colder season. But though her life's summer had been tolerably bright and glad, one flower had failed to bloom, had continued in bud, and if years like the present followed one another, might perish of the cold. No one suspected its existence—not even Peter. In his own mind, he dealt with his dear sister's prospects in the summary way that brothers will. 'Maida,' he thought, 'is a regular old maid, and a happy thing for me that she never met with the right person.' He was mistaken; she had, and in nine hours out of ten she believed herself the right person to him; but intervening doubts often struck a chill across her inner world, and the question then was, do these doubts arise in lucid intervals or the reverse? According to the strength of her convictions upon that point her spirits rose and fell; and as there was now little or nothing in outer life that could affect them, imagination too often tampered with the evidence of memory, and brightened scenes that in the natural course of things were fading from another mind. But Maida was not a woman who allowed herself to be overthrown by inward struggles; she was as active and eager as ever about all her pursuits: drawing, gardening, reading, and music filled up all the long

leisure of her quiet home, and when people who had known her in a less retired circle asked if she was not moped and dull, she could answer truly, that not one day seemed to her too long. But they often felt too lonely.

‘Why not have Isabel to live with us, Peter?’ she said one morning, as she stood by his study-fire folding up some letters they had just received.

‘It would be happier for her, poor little thing, than living with those stupid, pompous Wakemans. They make fuss enough about her, of course, but at seventeen that is not the best thing for a girl; and, from the tone of her letter, one can see how little she enjoys it.’

‘Do you mean you would like her to *live* here?’

‘Yes. Why not? Unless it would disturb you, I should like it extremely. I often want some one to speak to in the long evenings, and when I saw her two years ago at school, I thought her a sweet little creature, so gentle and ——’

‘Oh, she would not disturb me, and I should be glad enough to make this out-of-the-way place pleasanter to you. My only doubt is whether, with her expectations, it is quite fair to let her live as quietly as we do. And, besides, pretty girls don’t like seeing nobody from one week’s end to another.’